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Postscript

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Dániel Z. Kádár*

Postscript

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This Special Issue that the readers hold in their hands is also *special* in the literal sense of the word: as far as I am aware, it is the first ever publication that is dedicated to the study of politeness and impoliteness in ancient languages and cultures. The subject of history itself has received attention in (im)politeness research; there has been a variety of studies that have examined (im)politeness situated in historical times, such as Watts (1999), Beeching (2007), Culpeper and Archer (2008), and Pan and Kádár (2011), just to mention a few scholars who are known to be affiliated with politeness research. (Im)politeness has also played an important role in historical pragmatics research, as in the works of Jucker (2000, 2006), Fitzmaurice (2002) and others. Finally, research on historical (im)politeness has also been undertaken as a field of its own right; the two volumes Culpeper and Kádár (2010) and Bax and Kádár (2012) have made an attempt to establish and propagate this area. However, no previous study has ever attempted to go back to ancient times and examine (im)politeness behaviour across various languages and cultures. Although some scholars, in particular Hall (2009) examined politeness in single languages like Latin, these have remained isolated attempts. This is why Kim Ridealgh's project is unique: she has managed to bring together scholars who examine (im)politeness in a variety of highly important ancient languages.

This Special Issue may be relevant to readers with an interest in modern language use as well. It is possible to argue that there is little difference between historical and cross-cultural (im)politeness research, both of which utilize data that can provide challenging 'testing grounds' for (im)politeness theories based on modern data. As Kádár and Haugh (2013: 80, 176–178) argue, the social practice of (im)politeness is situated in space and time, and in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of (im)politeness it is necessary to a) study historically situated understandings of (im)politeness, and b) to compare modern understandings with these historical ones. There are certain ontological 'realities', which we in modernity take for granted, and which become problematic if we revisit them through historical lenses.

*Corresponding author: Dániel Z. Kádár, University of Huddersfield, English Linguistics and Foreign Language, Queensgate Huddersfield HD1 3DH, E-mail: d.z.kadar@hud.ac.uk

In what follows, instead of summarizing the contents of the Special Issue, I would like to point out some aspects of the research conducted in the papers, which in my view are relevant to the (im)politeness researcher, irrespective of whether one is interested in history or not:

- Several of these studies examine languages and cultures that played a very important role in the formation of modern pan-European or ‘Western’ norms of (im)politeness. This is not a universalistic claim: without making the sweeping generalization that (im)politeness operates in absolutely similar ways across Western languages and cultures, it is possible to argue that there are certain moral- and socio-philosophical principles that Westerners have inherited through their pan-European and Judeo-Christian heritage. For example, if we look into the phenomenon of bystander intervention (see Kádár and Marquez-Reiter 2015), it becomes evident that members of seemingly secular societies often re-enact Judeo-Christian values in their (im)politeness behaviour, even without noticing it. Thus, the examination of the roots of Western civilization makes an essential contribution to Western academic research on politeness. Interestingly, going back to the ‘roots’ has played an important role in the research of ‘exotic’ languages such as Chinese and Japanese, while in Western research this has been left behind, and so the articles of this Special Issue fill an extremely important knowledge gap — even though there is still plenty of work remaining to be done in this area!
- The papers introduce some very exciting data, which would otherwise be difficult for the ordinary reader to access, as in the case of the article “Polite like an Egyptian?”. Since an empirical aim of (im)politeness research is to broaden the scope of languages studied, it is a unique opportunity for the reader who has no background in these language — like myself — to access data delivered and interpreted by a team of experts.
- Finally, one point that I found extremely interesting, not so much as a reader with an interest in history but rather as a politeness theorist, is the multiplicity of frameworks applied by the papers. As I have argued above, historical (im)politeness is a testing ground for (im)politeness theories, and the authors of the articles in this Special Issue definitely utilize this advantage of the data, by testing the applicability of a variety of theories, spanning Brown and Levinson (1987), through convention and ritual research (e.g., Terkourafi 1999, 2010; Kádár 2013), to interactional frameworks of (im)politeness like Watts (2003).

As Francis Bacon said: *Et ipsa scientia potestas est*, ‘knowledge itself is power’. (Im)politeness research has certainly become an even more powerful discipline through this Special Issue.

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Bionote

Dániel Kádár

Dániel Kádár is currently Professor of English Language and Linguistics and Director of the Centre for Intercultural Politeness Research at Huddersfield University. He has published extensively on politeness research.